

Commentary Studies *in Malachi*

CHAPTER 1

1. THE BURDEN OF THE LORD TO ISRAEL BY MALACHI. (This verse sets the stage for the entire book; it is the Word of Jehovah to His Old Testament people through the prophet Malachi; the nature of the message is a "burden", a term used a number of times by the prophets when their message involved a judgment from God upon a people. For other instances of it, see Isa. 13:1; 15:1; 17:1; 19:1; Nahum 1:1. This book portrays the spiritual conditions of the Jews about four hundred years before Christ; the conditions were anything but good. With this book, God would terminate His revealing until the time of John the Baptist. In the days of Malachi, the Jews had been re-established in their land for more than one hundred years. The historical books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell of their returning; the prophetic books of Haggai and Zechariah tell of their rebuilding the temple; the book of Malachi shows us the state of things one hundred years after Haggai and Zechariah. The covenant name "Israel" is applied in this opening verse to the people of the southern kingdom because they constituted that part of the covenant people with whom God was still dealing.)

2. I HAVE LOVED YOU, SAITH THE LORD. (Before He begins to bring His charges against them, He wishes to remind them of His love for them, and that what He is about to say against them does not grow out of His lack of love for them, but of their lack of love for Him. In this world of doubts and qualms, one fact seems to stand out without much doubt: the love of God for mankind. But, in this verse, He is not affirming His love for mankind in general, but His love for Israel in particular.) YET YE SAY, WHEREIN HAST THOU LOVED US? (This was the retort of the Jews of Malachi's day to God's affirmation. Malachi often anticipated the hearers' objection, stated it, and then replied to it.) WAS NOT ESAU JACOB'S BROTHER? SAITH THE LORD: YET I LOVED JACOB,

3. AND I HATED ESAU, (For His love for Israel, God

goes back as far as His choosing Jacob and rejecting Esau. Rom. 9:13 quotes this verse in its discussion of Jacob and Esau.) AND LAID HIS MOUNTAINS AND HIS HERITAGE WASTE FOR THE DRAGONS OF THE WILDERNESS. (The Edomites, who lived to the south of the Jews, were the descendants of Esau. As a nation, Edom was overthrown by Babylon immediately after the Babylonians overthrew Jerusalem. Edom never recovered from that blow though God had already returned Israel to its land. The American Standard version more properly gives "jackals" instead of "dragons". The land of Edom was a wilderness waste in Malachi's day especially as compared to the restored Jerusalem and its surroundings.)

4. WHEREAS EDMO SAITH, WE ARE IMPOVERISHED, BUT WE WILL RETURN AND BUILD THE DESOLATE PLACES; (It was but natural for the Edomites to hope for a restoration to their former condition.) THUS SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS, THEY SHALL BUILD, BUT I WILL THROW DOWN; (The history between Malachi and Matthew shows that the Jews, under the Maccabees, subdued the Edomites who were left and forced them to be circumcised and to become to an extent swallowed up in the Jewish state.) AND THEY SHALL CALL THEM, THE BORDER OF WICKEDNESS, (because of the divine punishment meted out against them) AND, THE PEOPLE AGAINST WHOM THE LORD HATH INDIGNATION FOREVER. (Because God promised to be merciful to Israel, it was often remarked that God would not retain His anger forever. See Psa. 103:9; 30:5; Isa. 26:20. Though He punished Israel with a seventy year captivity, He returned to them with mercy. See Zech. 1:16,17. But, Edom had no such period of restoration.)

5. AND YOUR EYES SHALL SEE, AND YE SHALL SAY, THE LORD WILL BE MAGNIFIED FROM THE BORDER OF ISRAEL. (The real purpose for which God had showed His unusual love for Israel was yet to be fully realized in future years when He would bring the Messiah into the world through them and when from their Jerusalem, the everlasting gospel would be sounded forth. There could be no doubt about the love that Jehovah had shown for Malachi's people.)

6. A SON HONOURETH HIS FATHER (This was commanded in both Old and New Testaments, Exo. 20:12;

Eph. 6:2. People in Paul's time were accustomed to parent-honoring children, Heb. 12:9, disobedience to parents being a state of affairs yet future to their times, II Tim. 3:1,2, but well known in our day. Too much leniency and too little accounting are prime causes of present day delinquency. A Biblical curse is pronounced upon the dishonoring, disobedient child, Prov. 30:17. Under the Old Testament, the disobedient son was to be stoned by the men of his city, Deut. 21:18-21.) AND A SERVANT HIS MASTER: (The master-servant relationship existed throughout Bible times. The servant owed both honor and service to the master who fed, clothed, and housed both him and his family. The New Testament gives instructions to both master and servant, Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22--4:1.) IF THEN I BE A FATHER, WHERE IS MINE HONOUR? AND IF I BE A MASTER, WHERE IS MY FEAR, SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS (God laid claim to being both a Father and a Master to His people. His pointed questions here indicate their failure to honor and revere Him as they should.) UNTO YOU, O PRIESTS, THAT DESPISE MY NAME. (Of all people who should have honored and feared God, it was the priests, the religious leaders. But, often those who should lead the people closer to God are actually found leading them away from God. All the charges God raises against them in Malachi are based upon the fact that they despised God, whom they should have honored and feared. What a sad state exists among the people when their leaders are corrupt like these priests!) AND YE SAY, WHEREIN HAVE WE DESPISED THY NAME? (So often, people are blind to their true condition before God. Before God began to specify the exact thing they were doing, He wanted them to know its serious involvement, that of despising Him.)

7. YE OFFER POLLUTED BREAD UPON MINE ALTAR; (That which was placed upon the altar was dedicated to God. Calling it "bread", as in this passage, or "food", as in Lev. 3:11,16; 21:6, likens the altar to a table as if God did eat from it as the fire consumed that which was upon it.) AND YE SAY, WHEREIN HAVE WE POLLUTED THEE? IN THAT YE SAY, THE TABLE OF THE LORD IS CONTEMPTIBLE. (The priests were apparently still in a quandary as to what Malachi was driving at. It would seem that his charge of their offering "polluted" bread—offerings that were not according to the law of God—would have been definite enough. But, in the next verse, he comes right out with his specification.)

8. AND IF YE OFFER THE BLIND FOR SACRIFICE, IS IT NOT EVIL? AND IF YE OFFER THE LAME AND SICK, IS IT NOT EVIL? (These were the "polluted" offerings: animals that were blind, lame, and sick. They had no market value to the ones offering them, and there was the possibility that they might die at any time. Instead of sacrificing animals without blemish as their law demanded, Lev. 22:19,20, they were trying to slough these off upon God. What a combination of thoughts! that God must be worshipped, but we can give Him the left-overs, that which we will not miss. Such is not real worship, for that which we give and do not miss represents no sacrifice upon our part. What a way to treat God from whom all blessings flow!) OFFER IT NOW UNTO THE GOVERNOR; WILL HE BE PLEASED WITH THEE, OR ACCEPT THY PERSON? SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS. (It was customary to present gifts when visiting governmental dignitaries or upon special occasions, such as the Queen of Sheba's gift to Solomon, I Kings 10:1,2, and the wise men's gifts for the newly born King, Matt. 2:11. Malachi employed irony when he suggested that they try such tactics on their governor. Of course, he would not regard such a gift except with contempt, which was the same way that God regarded them. Such gifts, instead of procuring the favor of the governor or of God, would be the cause of obtaining disfavor. Those who offer nothing are at least not guilty of insulting God with the unworthiness of that which is offered.)

9. AND NOW, I PRAY YOU, BESEECH GOD THAT HE WILL BE GRACIOUS UNTO US: THIS HATH BEEN BY YOUR MEANS (Hebrew: 'from your hand'): WILL HE REGARD YOUR PERSONS? SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS. (This verse is admittedly difficult. Some think it is an entreaty for the priests to call upon God as intercessors. But, it seems more like irony, for the polluted sacrifices were blamed upon them, and God would not accept them as intercessors for the people. Notice that the exhortation was to them as intercessors for the people—not entreating God to be merciful upon their own sins.)

10. WHO IS THERE EVEN AMONG YOU THAT WOULD SHUT THE DOORS FOR NAUGHT? NEITHER DO YE KINDLE FIRE ON MINE ALTAR FOR NAUGHT. (The American Standard reads instead, "Oh that there were one among you that would shut the doors, that ye might not kindle fire on mine altar in vain!" The King James rendering would be rebuking the priests' mercenary at-

titude: none would so much as close the doors of the temple or kindle a fire on the altar without thinking uppermost of getting paid for it. Many preachers in the religious world today are like this. The American Standard rendering would be the strongest kind of statement of the way God felt toward the corrupt priesthood. If we have concluded right about verse 9's being irony, then the American Standard rendering is probably to be preferred in this verse. What hope would there be for a people when their very leaders, their intercessors, were so corrupt that God wanted them to stay out of the temple and away from the altar?) I HAVE NO PLEASURE IN YOU, SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS, NEITHER WILL I ACCEPT AN OFFERING AT YOUR HAND. (This seems to confirm the positions we have taken on verses 9 and 10.)

11. FOR FROM THE RISING OF THE SUN EVEN UNTO THE GOING DOWN OF THE SAME MY NAME SHALL BE GREAT AMONG THE GENTILES; AND IN EVERY PLACE INCENSE SHALL BE OFFERED UNTO MY NAME, AND A PURE OFFERING; FOR MY NAME SHALL BE GREAT AMONG THE HEATHEN, SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS. (God was looking forward to better things in the future when, under the gospel dispensation, Gentile subjects would do His will. Throughout the books of the prophets, when one reads of Gentiles worshipping Jehovah, he knows he is reading of new covenant times. Catholics try to find great comfort in this passage. They say it pictures the incense burning continually upon their altars everywhere. They claim this as a mark of their being the true church, for they alone are doing such. But, there is a principle of interpreting these prophetic writings that they are overlooking; namely, the prophets employed the terminology of their times in speaking of the future. For instance, take Isa. 60:3-7 in which Isaiah looked to the present age under the Messiah. He foresaw the Gentiles worshipping Jehovah, bringing their gold and incense and offering their animals as sacrifices upon God's altar. Now, we know that we are expressly forbidden to offer animal sacrifices today. All three things mentioned—gold, incense, and animal sacrifices—were in vogue in Isaiah's day. The prophet was using the language of his day in speaking of our day. The same is true of keeping solemn feasts and performing vows in Nahum 1:15, of keeping the feast of the new moon in Isa. 66:23, and of keeping the feast of tabernacles in Zech. 14:18.)

12. BUT YE HAVE PROFANED IT, IN THAT YE SAY, THE TABLE OF THE LORD IS POLLUTED; AND THE FRUIT THEREOF, EVEN HIS MEAT, IS CONTEMPTIBLE. (Malachi brings the Gentiles into the picture to show a marked contrast between the way that God's name would be honored by them and the way that the Jews were then dishonoring it.)

13. YE SAID ALSO, BEHOLD, WHAT A WEARINESS IS IT! (Those whose hearts are not in the matter feel that serving God is wearisome. God wants service from the heart, Mark 7:6; II Cor. 9:7. He deplores lukewarmness, Rev. 3:15,16. Those who love God do not think His commandments are grievous, I John 5:2,3. AND YE HAVE SNUFFED AT IT, SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS: (This is a figure of speech borrowed from cattle blowing through their nostrils upon feed that they do not care for. What a way to treat the service of Jehovah! Let all today claiming to be God's servants be careful not to think of it as a wearisome task that is to be snuffed at. Some are weary in well doing.) AND YE BROUGHT THAT WHICH WAS TORN, AND THE LAME, AND THE SICK: THUS YE BROUGHT AN OFFERING: SHOULD I ACCEPT THIS OF YOUR HAND? SAITH THE LORD. (Already commented upon under verse 8.)

14. BUT CURSED BE THE DECEIVER, WHICH HATH IN HIS FLOCK A MALE, AND VOWETH, AND SACRIFICETH UNTO THE LORD A CORRUPT THING: (God pronounces a curse upon those who have that which He asks for and who give Him some shameful thing instead. What a rebuke today to those who instead of bringing their tithes and offerings resort to selling faded, patched, and worn out garments at rummage sales in order to finance religion! What a rebuke to those who own their farms or businesses, live in fine homes, wear expensive clothes, and drive big cars and then give mere "chicken feed" change when they attend church services,) FOR I AM A GREAT KING, SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS, (You would never guess it by such paltry ways of financing His work) AND MY NAME IS DREADFUL AMONG THE HEATHEN. (May His name ever be hallowed by us who were heathen then, but Christians now.)

CHAPTER 2

1. AND NOW, O YE PRIESTS, (Having dealt with the corrupt priests throughout chapter 1, God continues to deal with

them in this chapter.) THIS COMMANDMENT IS FOR YOU. (He is about to tell them what He will do to them because of their ways. This announcement is called a "commandment" because He was going to command trouble to come upon them. For a similar use of the term, see Lev. 25:21.)

2. IF YE WILL NOT HEAR, AND IF YE WILL NOT LAY IT TO HEART, (Some have ears with which to hear, but they do not hear, and hearts with which to understand, but they do not understand, Matt. 13:15. Even today there is great need for people to "take to heart" what God says. David said, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee," Psa. 119:11.) TO GIVE GLORY UNTO MY NAME, (The charge brought against them in chapter 1 is here reiterated.) SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS, (One of the prophets' favorite titles for God. It is used no less than twenty-four times in this short book of Malachi. "Hosts" implies the idea of "many". He is the Lord of many. It probably implies more than anything else that He has a multitude of angelic beings at His disposal to carry out His judgments upon the disobedient. It should have smitten fear into their hearts.) I WILL EVEN SEND A CURSE UPON YOU, AND I WILL CURSE YOUR BLESSINGS: YEA, I HAVE CURSED THEM ALREADY, BECAUSE YE DO NOT LAY IT TO HEART. (The idea of "curse" is found in every chapter of Malachi: 1:14; 2:2; 3:9; 4:6. It implies just the opposite of "blessing". God both blesses the godly and curses the ungodly. Some do not believe that He does either; everything that happens is ascribed only to natural causes. God said in Zeph. 1:12 that He was going to punish such people. "I will curse your blessings" indicates that whereas He had blessed them, He now would curse them instead. Actually, the process was already being reversed at the time Malachi wrote. Blessings discontinued and curses sent—all because they would not "lay it to heart"!)

3. BEHOLD, I WILL CORRUPT YOUR SEED, (In chapter 3:9-12, Malachi discusses God's curse upon them in material things in which he shows the effect of God's curse upon their crops. The present passage shows that God would get at the very root of their hope for a crop by ruining the seed that they would plant.) AND SPREAD DUNG (manure) UPON YOUR FACES, (Instead of man's using it for increased crop yields, God was going to smear it, so to speak, upon their faces. People hate to have something like that on them anywhere; how terrible to have it smeared on their faces! It is possible, since these words are spoken

to the priests, that he is talking about the dung of the sacrificial animals, which was to be carried outside the camp and burned, Lev. 16:27,28. If that be the thought, God was going to throw it into their faces instead, thus making this one of the strongest ways for God to express His contempt for their sacrifices.) EVEN THE DUNG OF YOUR SOLEMN FEASTS; AND ONE SHALL TAKE YOU AWAY WITH IT. (God's utter repudiation of those priests was very evident.)

4. AND YE SHALL KNOW THAT I HAVE SENT THIS COMMANDMENT UNTO YOU, THAT MY COVENANT MIGHT BE WITH LEVI, SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS. (When the fulness of His curse fell upon them, they would know that He had rejected them as priests, but not His priestly covenant with Levi. God frequently told the unbelieving and unfaithful that they would come to know how wrong they had been and how right He was when they experienced His punishing hand upon them: Exo. 14:18; Num. 16:26-30; I Kings 22:19-28; Eze. 6:13,14; 7:23-27; 12:15; and many others. We see also in this place that they would find themselves out of the priesthood, though the priesthood would go on. Many even to this day, through their own unfaithfulness, wake up to find themselves out of the gospel ministry, though the work of evangelism goes on; out of the eldership, though the work of pastoring goes on; out of the church, though the church goes on. God may cut off unworthy individuals, but He will not abandon His plan and program. The covenant with Levi did continue—in actuality until it had fulfilled its course with the passing of the Old Covenant, Heb. 8:4-6; 7:12-16, and in antitype in the priesthood of all Christians, Rev. 1:6; Mal. 3:3; I Pet. 2:5.)

5. MY COVENANT WAS WITH HIM OF LIFE AND PEACE; AND I GAVE THEM TO HIM FOR THE FEAR WHEREWITH HE FEARED ME, AND WAS AFRAID BEFORE MY NAME. (In those earlier years, the Levites seemed to be noticeably stronger in their faith and adherence to the law of God than the other Israelites. They refused to take part in the calf worship at Mt. Sinai, Ex. 32:26. When the Israelites fell into idolatrous fornication in the plains of Moab, the Levite Phinehas showed his indignation with forthright action, Num. 25:1-8. At that time, God approvingly said of the priest Phinehas, "Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace; and he shall have it, and his seed after him," Num. 25:12,13. God apparently refers to this statement in the Malachi passage under consideration.

6. THE LAW OF TRUTH WAS IN HIS MOUTH, AND INIQUITY WAS NOT FOUND IN HIS LIPS; HE WALKED WITH ME IN PEACE AND EQUITY, AND DID TURN MANY AWAY FROM INIQUITY. (The priest was the representative of the people before God in making atonement for their sins, but he was the representative of God to the people in the law that he taught and exemplified. Faithful priests made for faithful people whereas the corrupt priests of Malachi's day made for a corrupt people before God.)

7. FOR THE PRIEST'S LIPS SHOULD KEEP KNOWLEDGE, AND THEY SHOULD SEEK THE LAW AT HIS MOUTH; FOR HE IS THE MESSENGER OF THE LORD OF HOSTS. (According to Lev. 10:11 and Deut. 33:10, God had appointed the priest to be a teacher of the people as well as an officiator at the altar. In this twofold responsibility, he was a true mediator: God's messenger to the people and a representative of the people before God.)

8. BUT YE ARE DEPARTED OUT OF THE WAY; (They had not stayed right themselves.) YE HAVE CAUSED MANY TO STUMBLE AT THE LAW; (Instead of causing people to keep the law, they had gone along with the corrupt sacrifices dealt with in chapter 1 and with other sinful practices yet to be discussed in the book.) YE HAVE CORRUPTED THE COVENANT OF LEVI, SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS. (Instead of being a credit to their office, they had actually corrupted the priestly covenant itself. Unworthy bunch! Priests only in name!)

9. THEREFORE HAVE I ALSO MADE YOU CONTEMPTIBLE AND BASE BEFORE ALL THE PEOPLE, (Instead of lifting the people, they stooped to the people's level. Those who see what such leaders have done cannot respect them for it. Sinners may think us to be too strict, but they have more respect for us now than they would if we stooped to their level. In summary, a person receives no more honor than his person deserves.) ACCORDING AS YE HAVE NOT KEPT MY WAYS, BUT HAVE BEEN PARTIAL IN THE LAW. (The American Standard reads instead, "Have had respect of persons in the law." Those who trifle with the law out of respect for certain men's persons are disqualified to represent that law that respects no man's person. With the next verse, he begins a new topic.)

10. HAVE WE NOT ALL ONE FATHER? (The answer

is "yes".) HATH NOT ONE GOD CREATED US? (Again the answer is "yes".) WHY DO WE DEAL TREACHEROUSLY EVERY MAN AGAINST HIS BROTHER, BY PROFANING THE COVENANT OF OUR FATHERS? (Malachi was about to deal with the Israelites of his day for their violation of the law of God concerning marriages with those outside of Israel. All Israel worshipped the one God, who had created them, and this fact should have bound them so close together that they would never have put away an Israelite in order to marry a foreigner. This was counted a violation of brotherliness as well as a profaning of the law that God gave to their fathers in Deut. 7:3.)

11. JUDAH HATH DEALT TREACHEROUSLY, AND AN ABOMINATION IS COMMITTED IN ISRAEL AND IN JERUSALEM; (Notice the strong language used to depict God's attitude toward their actions.) FOR JUDAH HATH PROFANED THE HOLINESS OF THE LORD WHICH HE LOVED, AND HATH MARRIED THE DAUGHTER OF A STRANGE GOD. (It was God's desire that Israel be His own people; Exo. 19:5; Deut. 14:2; 26:18. They were to be set apart to God. Throughout the days of the Old Covenant, Jehovah was to be their only God, and they were to be His only people. This holiness was being profaned by the Israelites' actions in marrying those who were worshippers of other gods and at the same time mixing foreign blood into the people of God.)

12. THE LORD WILL CUT OFF THE MAN THAT DOETH THIS, (God dealt with Solomon for this very thing, I Kings 11:1-11. A half century or so before Malachi's time, the godly Ezra had dealt with the same problem, Ezra 9 and 10.) The same God today instructs His people to marry "only in the Lord", I Cor. 7:39. THE MASTER AND THE SCHOLAR, OUT OF THE TABERNACLES OF JACOB, (The great and the small, the leader and those led. There was no respect of persons with God. The expression, "cut off", is used many times in the Old Testament. God cut off some people with death; others were cut off by being put out of the congregation; others were cut off by having all their descendants wiped out.) AND HIM THAT OFFERETH AN OFFERING UNTO THE LORD OF HOSTS. (Probably even the priests were guilty of this sin of marriage with foreigners. At least, they were in Ezra's day, Ezra 9:1,2; 10:18. Some advance the thought upon this statement that God would even cut off the priest who would try to make an

offering for this sin.)

13. AND THIS HAVE YE DONE AGAIN, COVERING THE ALTAR OF THE LORD WITH TEARS, WITH WEEPING, AND WITH CRYING OUT, INSOMUCH THAT HE REGARDETH NOT THE OFFERING ANY MORE, OR RECEIVETH IT WITH GOOD WILL AT YOUR HAND. (Often those with little true piety can make a big show of their religious practices, as in Isa. 1:15. God could not be fooled by this religious put-on.)

14. YET YE SAY, WHEREFORE? (And Malachi is quick to supply them with the information in that which follows.) BECAUSE THE LORD HATH BEEN WITNESS BETWEEN THEE AND THE WIFE OF THY YOUTH, AGAINST WHOM THOU HAST DEALT TREACHEROUSLY: (It is evident that the men had been putting away their Hebrew wives in order to marry the heathen wives. God had heard them give themselves to each other in marriage many years before, and He had never forgotten. He was now beholding their violation of their marital promises, and He was testifying against them through the prophet Malachi. His eyes are everywhere beholding the conduct of men, Prov. 15:3. He knows our works, Rev. 2:2,9,13,19; 3:3,8,15, for He walks in our midst, Rev. 1:13. When one establishes an interest in and later a marriage with a strange woman, he has certainly "dealt treacherously" with his former mate. He leaves her life a wreck; he brings doubts into people's minds concerning her; he leaves her to shift for herself; and he leaves her children half orphaned.) YET IS SHE THY COMPANION, AND THE WIFE OF THY COVENANT. (God attempted in various ways to strike both a convicted and a sentimental chord in their hearts.)

15. AND DID NOT HE MAKE ONE? (Evidently referring to God's having created but one woman for Adam to have.) YET HAD HE THE RESIDUE OF THE SPIRIT. (He could have made more, proving that He purposely made but one woman.) THAT HE MIGHT SEEK A GODLY SEED. (What evils result when men put away their original wives in order to marry others! This God sought to avoid.) THEREFORE TAKE HEED TO YOUR SPIRIT, AND LET NONE DEAL TREACHEROUSLY AGAINST THE WIFE OF HIS YOUTH.

16. FOR THE LORD, THE GOD OF ISRAEL, SAITH THAT HE HATETH PUTTING AWAY: (In marriage, God

has joined the man and the woman together, and "what God hath joined together, let not man put assunder," Matt. 19:6. Inspiration uses no lesser word than "hateth" to represent God's feelings concerning such divorcing.) FOR ONE COVERETH VIOLENCE WITH HIS GARMENT, SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS; (Man tries to cover up a lot of things so they will look better than they really are, but they were not fooling God with their actions.) THEREFORE TAKE HEED TO YOUR SPIRIT, THAT YE DEAL NOT TREACHEROUSLY. (The instruction of verse 15 is here repeated for an emphatic conclusion.)

17. YE HAVE WEARIED THE LORD WITH YOUR WORDS. (It is noteworthy that God is not a numb God. He has feelings: He loves, John 3:16; and He abhors, Lev. 26:30; He can be grieved, Gen. 6:6, and He can be delighted, Prov. 15:8; He can be pleased, Matt. 3:17, and He can be displeased, Gen. 38:10. Those of Malachi's day had "wearied" Him.) YET YE SAY, WHEREIN HAVE WE WEARIED HIM? (They were still blind to their faults.) WHEN YE SAY, EVERY ONE THAT DOETH EVIL IS GOOD IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD, AND HE DELIGHTETH IN THEM; OR, WHERE IS THE GOD OF JUDGMENT? (How mixed up can people get in their thinking? The Bible teaches that God blesses the good people and punishes the evil people, but they had it all backwards. They thought that God was blessing those whom Malachi condemned, and by asking, "Where is the God of judgment?" they were implying that He was punishing those whom Malachi labeled wicked even though they were being punished at the very time, verse 2. Their mixed up thinking recalls what the people said to Jeremiah in Jer. 44:15-19. Malachi returned to this subject in his next chapter.)

CHAPTER 3

1. BEHOLD, I WILL SEND MY MESSENGER, (John the Baptist), AND HE SHALL PREPARE THE WAY BEFORE ME; (John prepared the way by preparing the minds of as many as would repent of their sins by his preaching. God predicted the comings of both John the Baptist and Jesus in this verse, and Luke 1 records the angelic announcements of both of their births, John's to his father and Jesus' to His mother.) AND THE LORD, WHOM YE SEEK, (their long awaited Messiah) SHALL SUDDENLY COME TO THE

TEMPLE, (When He came, many did not believe upon Him. To them, His coming was too sudden! But, let us not suppose that God had sent Him sooner than He had planned to do. In Daniel's Seventy-Week prophecy, Dan. 9:20-27, God foretold the exact time when the Messiah would come,) EVEN THE MESSENGER OF THE COVENANT, (He would be the fulfiller of their covenant, Matt. 5:17, and the mediator of a new covenant, Heb. 9:15, whose inauguration had been foretold by Jeremiah even before the captivity, Jer. 31:31-34.) WHOM YE DELIGHT IN: (They had long dreamed of and hoped for the coming of the Messiah.) BEHOLD, HE SHALL COME, SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS.

2. BUT WHO MAY ABIDE THE DAY OF THE COMING? AND WHO SHALL STAND WHEN HE APPEARETH? (What a startling thought to his readers! To them, the coming of the Messiah had been thought of as something to look forward to, but these questions suggested something else. The prophet Simeon told the Christ child's mother that He was set for not only the rising of, but for the falling of many in Israel, Luke 2:34, and time demonstrated that fact. The Jews as a people did not abide His coming, Rom. 11:18-21. The religious leaders of Jesus' day did not abide His coming. Those who should have been the builders stubbed their toes on Him and fell, Acts 4:11; I Pet. 2:7,8.) FOR HE IS LIKE A REFINER'S FIRE, (to destroy that which is not real gold or silver) AND LIKE FULLERS' SOAP; (Originally a fuller was a person who carded wool; later a fuller also laundered clothes, Mark 9:3.)

3. AND HE SHALL SIT AS A REFINER AND PURIFIER OF SILVER; AND HE SHALL PURIFY THE SONS OF LEVI, AND PURGE THEM AS GOLD AND SILVER, THAT THEY MAY OFFER UNTO THE LORD AN OFFERING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS. (This would not sound good to the priests of Malachi's day! They needed purging. But, the actual fulfillment is in the priesthood of all Christians under Christ. We are a royal priesthood, I Pet. 2:9. He has made us kings and priests unto God, Rev. 1:6. Notice the similarity between this passage and I Pet. 2:5: "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." With all the polluted sacrifices being offered by the corrupt priesthood of Malachi's day, how God must have longed for the arrival of this dispensation when He would have a holy priesthood that would offer up spiritual sacrifices! Do you believe in purity? in refinement? Notice that

Christ is a purifier and a refiner.)

4. THEN SHALL THE OFFERING OF JUDAH AND JERUSALEM BE PLEASANT UNTO THE LORD, AS IN THE DAYS OF OLD, AND AS IN FORMER YEARS. (Things religious have the tendency to become corrupted with age. The priesthood began holy, but degenerated. The "royal priesthood" would be like the original priesthood in meeting God's pleasure. It is our task to see that that priesthood is not corrupt in our day though we live so many, many years this side of its institution.)

5. AND I WILL COME NEAR TO YOU TO JUDGMENT: (Men cannot get away with sin for long. Every transgression and disobedience will receive a just recompense. God will bring every work into judgment.) AND I WILL BE SWIFT WITNESS AGAINST THE SORCERERS, (In the strongest language, God forbid all types of sorcery to the Jews, Deut. 18:9-12. They were not to permit a witch to live, Exo. 22:18. During the reign of Saul, he had sought to rid the land of all such, I Sam. 28:3, although in his final distress, when God would not answer him, he resorted to a witch at Endor, I Sam. 28:5-7. Babylon has been called "the Mother Country of Diviners", and the influence of the Jews' seventy years there is evident by Malachi's mention of its prevalence here.) AND AGAINST THE ADULTERERS, (Is there any sin list in the Scriptures that does not include this shameful sin?) AND AGAINST THE FALSE SWEARERS, (The purpose of oaths among the Jews was to give assurance that the one taking the oath would surely keep his word. "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain" specifically condemned using God's name in an oath that was not carried out. Thus to swear and not keep it amounted to anarchy against the truth itself, for which God said He would not hold the person guiltless, Exo. 20:7.) AND AGAINST THOSE THAT OPPRESS THE HIRELING IN HIS WAGES, (Then as now, the rich hired the poor to do their work. God does not condemn that, but He does condemn the rich's abusing the poor, such as withholding their wages, Jas. 5:1-4.) THE WIDOW, AND THE FATHERLESS, AND TURN ASIDE THE STRANGER FROM HIS RIGHT, (They took advantage of the woman and the children whom death had robbed of their provider. They also turned cold shoulders to the strangers. God made special laws out of consideration for the widow, the fatherless, and the stranger, Exo. 22:22-24; Deut. 10:17-19; 14:28,29; 24:19-22. We are to

remember the affliction of the widows and the orphans, Jas. 1:27, and we are taught to be mindful of the stranger, Heb. 13:2; Matt. 25:41-43.) AND FEAR NOT ME, SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS, (The sin from which all the others stemmed, When men fear God, they depart from evil, Prov. 3:7, and when they fear God, they keep His commandments, Eccl. 12:13. Their lack of godly fear has been evident all through the book of Malachi.)

6. FOR I AM THE LORD, (Where the King James prints LORD in all capital letters, the American Standard translates it "Jehovah". This verse contains one such instance. "Jehovah" to the Jew meant the covenant-keeping God. This name receives a significant use in this passage.) I CHANGE NOT; (He is unvarying in His person, Jas. 1:17. When He swears, He will not repent or change, Psa. 110:4. In this passage, however, He is not looking so much at the overall as He is His covenant that He had made with the Israelites as a people. Through them, He had promised to bring the Messiah into the world. He still had that plan in mind in Malachi's day.) THEREFORE YE SONS OF JACOB ARE NOT CONSUMED. (It was not their particular holiness that had saved them as a people as much as it was God's covenant with their fathers and His unchanging faithfulness to that covenant. Had God not made and kept that covenant, they would have been consumed a long time before—just like the northern portion of Israel had whose existence was not necessary for the fulfillment of the covenant promises.)

7. EVEN FROM THE DAYS OF YOUR FATHERS YE ARE GONE AWAY FROM MINE ORDINANCES, AND HAVE NOT KEPT THEM, (Malachi did not fear telling them that their forefathers had been disobedient. They could read it in the earlier books of their Scripture: Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Judges, Isaiah, and Jeremiah—just to name a few. Their many national sorrows had come upon them simply because of disobedience. God had blessed every godly king they had ever had, and He cursed every disobedient one. He had exalted the nation when He was worshipped and served, and He had brought reproach upon it when it became sinful. These facts were matters of record. The truth was far from complimentary as is so often the case.)

7. RETURN UNTO ME, (God's constant appeal to the backslidden, Jer. 3:12,22; 18:11; Eze. 18:23. The prodigal

son of Luke 15 returned to his father's house. This word implies that sin separates.) AND I WILL RETURN UNTO YOU, SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS. (The God whom they left was willing to receive them back. Like the father of the prodigal, He still rejoices over the penitent. Man can be sure that if he draws nigh to God, He will draw nigh to him, Jas. 4:8.) BUT YE SAID, WHEREIN SHALL WE RETURN? (No book emphasizes the blindness of sinners more than Malachi. Other passages declare the blinding nature of sin, Eph. 4:18; Rom. 11:25; II Pet. 1:9; II Cor. 4:4; Rev. 3:17; Acts 26:18. The people of Malachi's day demonstrated that blindness.)

8. WILL A MAN ROB GOD? (The obvious answer that people would give would be, "Of course, not.") YET YE HAVE ROBBED ME. (He startles them with a statement of their guilt before specifying exactly the way in which they had robbed Him.) BUT YE SAY, WHEREIN HAVE WE ROBBED THEE? (He was very abrupt in answering.) IN TITHES AND OFFERINGS. (The word "tithe" means "tenth". God claimed the tenth as His, Lev. 27:30,32. Even before the law of Moses, men of God recognized the sacredness of the tenth, Heb. 7:1,2; Gen. 14:17-20; 28:20-22. It is hard to imagine how people today can suppose that they can bring less to God! But, their obligation involved "offerings" besides the tenth.)

9. YE ARE CURSED WITH A CURSE; FOR YE HAVE ROBBED ME, EVEN THIS WHOLE NATION. (Disobedience brings its just punishment. They had robbed God of material things; succeeding verses show that their punishment consisted of material blessings being withheld. Some sins are practiced by individuals, some by families, some by groups, and some by whole countries. The "whole nation" was guilty of robbing God of tithes and offerings. In finances, people tend to be affected by the delinquency of others. Where you find one shirker, you find many. But, in doing so, people need to realize that they are ROBBING GOD when they withhold from Him their tithes and offerings. We have every reason to believe that in so doing, they are actually causing God to withhold His blessings from them. We need His blessings more than He needs our money. Who, then, is the actual loser? Who is getting hurt the more?)

10. BRING YE ALL THE TITHES (They had several different tithes. He wanted them to be faithful in all of them.)

INTO THE STOREHOUSE, (The temple, II Chron. 31:11,12; Neh. 10:38,39) THAT THERE MAY BE MEAT IN MINE HOUSE, (For the priests, who lived of the things of the temple, I Cor. 9:13) AND PROVE ME NOW HEREWITH, SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS, IF I WILL NOT OPEN YOU THE WINDOWS OF HEAVEN, AND POUR YOU OUT A BLESSING, THAT THERE SHALL NOT BE ROOM ENOUGH TO RECEIVE IT. (God had made wonderful promises for obedience. He here showed a willingness to be put to the test. "The windows of heaven" were said to have been opened at the time of the flood, Gen. 7:11. God now promised to open those windows and deluge them with blessings. What a difference between those who serve God and those who don't!)

11. AND I WILL REBUKE THE DEVOURER (Probably the locust, the worst menace that their crops had besides drouth; often one accompanied the other) FOR YOUR SAKES, AND HE SHALL NOT DESTROY THE FRUITS OF YOUR GROUND; (This implies that that which they would not give to God, He had been seeing that they didn't get to have it for themselves.) NEITHER SHALL YOUR VINE CAST HER FRUIT BEFORE THE TIME IN THE FIELD, SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS. (Apparently He had been letting their crops grow to a certain stage and the fruit to set on only to send locusts to devour the crops and to cause by other means the fruit to drop off the vine before it was ripe. In their blindness, they had probably cursed the locusts and other causes instead of thinking that God had sent them upon them because of their sins. Men today do the same thing.)

12. AND ALL NATIONS SHALL CALL YOU BLESSED; (When God blesses, others are able to see it, Matt. 6:4,6.) FOR YE SHALL BE A DELIGHTSOME LAND, SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS. (A happy people living in a happy land—a condition envisioned by the Psalmist in Psa. 144:12-15.)

13. YOUR WORDS HAVE BEEN STOUT AGAINST ME, SAITH THE LORD. (In 2:17, He had dealt with them concerning their words. Here He brings the matter up again. We shall be justified or condemned by our words as well as by our deeds, Matt. 12:37.) YET YE SAY, WHAT HAVE WE SPOKEN SO MUCH AGAINST THEE? (Still blind! This book gives ample proof that speakers must do more than speak in generalities if people are to get the point. Like Malachi, they must specify.)

14. YE HAVE SAID, (He had the proof to back up his charge against them. How tragic when a speaker doesn't!) IT IS VAIN TO SERVE GOD; WHAT PROFIT IS IT THAT WE HAVE KEPT HIS ORDINANCE, AND THAT WE HAVE WALKED MOURNFULLY BEFORE THE LORD OF HOSTS? (Theirs was not a case of rendering acceptable service to God and He not blessing them; it was His having to chasten them because of their unacceptable service. We have just studied how He withheld nature's blessings from them because they had not been bringing tithes and offerings. Instead of questioning whether God blesses the faithful, they should have been questioning whether they were right before God! They sound like backsliders; "We have kept His ordinance.....We have walked mournfully before the Lord." Those who do little magnify that which they have done until it comes to seem great in their minds whereas those who do much realize it is so very little compared with what they would like to do for God.)

15. AND HOW WE CALL THE PROUD HAPPY: (More stout words.) YEA, THEY THAT WORK WICKEDNESS ARE SET UP; (Sometimes God lets the tree grow bigger before He cuts it down that it might make a bigger crashing when it falls.) YEA, THEY THAT TEMPT GOD ARE EVEN DELIVERED. (Just as they said in verse 14 that God did not actually bless those who did His will, in this verse they are saying that He does not punish those who violate it. He does punish all evildoers, but not always as soon as some people suppose that He should. All who think as those of Malachi's day should immediately read Psa. 73:1-19. God will have more to say upon this in the last verses of this chapter.)

16. THEN THEY THAT FEARED THE LORD (Though prevailing conditions get bad, there are usually those few who are striving to be faithful to God.) SPAKE OFTEN ONE TO ANOTHER: (Such times of evil draw good people closer together. That remnant in Malachi's day, the same as in our day, enjoyed getting together often for strengthening and encouragement.) AND THE LORD HEARKENED, AND HEARD IT, (He knows where the honest hearts and souls are, what they are doing, and what they are enduring. "The Lord knoweth them that are his," II Tim. 2:19.) AND A BOOK OF REMEMBRANCE WAS WRITTEN BEFORE HIM FOR THEM THAT FEARED THE LORD, AND THAT THOUGHT UPON HIS NAME. (He does not forget what people have done in His service, Heb. 6:10. Oh the

mindfulness of the Lord concerning them who are mindful of Him! If we do what He tells us to do, He will care for us here, Matt. 6:33, and will reward us in even greater ways at the resurrection of the just, Luke 14:13,14. He will not forget. Though Cornelius was not yet one of His, He had been noting His desire to do what was right, and the angel told him, "Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God," Acts 9:4. God blessed him with the greatest blessing that He could; namely, having the gospel brought to him.)

17. AND THEY SHALL BE MINE, SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS, IN THAT DAY WHEN I MAKE UP MY JEWELS; AND I WILL SPARE THEM, AS A MAN SPARETH HIS OWN SON THAT SERVETH HIM. (When the bad fish are cast away, the good fish will be gathered into vessels, Matt. 13:47-50. The angels will do the sorting, assuring us that there will be no mistakes made—none saved that ought to be discarded, and none discarded that ought to be saved—and assuring us also that human thoughts about and human prejudices against God's people will in no way affect the angelic sorters.)

18. THEN SHALL YE RETURN (When He rewards the righteous and repays the wicked,) AND DISCERN BETWEEN THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED, BETWEEN HIM THAT SERVETH GOD AND HIM THAT SERVETH HIM NOT. (They would no longer say, "God does not bless the righteous;" or, "God does not punish the wicked." By God's treatment of men, they would be able to discern between the faithful and the wicked. The righteous have always been willing to rest their cases with God, knowing that all will end well for them when it will not for the others. The rightness of the righteous will be even more apparent in that day than now. It will be universally recognized then while only partly so now.)

CHAPTER 4

1. FOR BEHOLD, THE DAY COMETH, THAT SHALL BURN AS AN OVEN; (Coming judgment! Probably the final judgment yet to come, although many aspects of the prophecy might suggest its fulfillment in 70 A.D., when God poured out His wrath against the Jewish nation for their many generations of sinning. "Shall burn as an oven" is a reminder that every picture of judgment in the Bible

is calculated to excite the greatest fear over that coming day for those who are unprepared.) AND ALL THE PROUD, YEA, AND ALL THAT DO WICKEDLY, SHALL BE STUBBLE; AND THE DAY THAT COMETH SHALL BURN THEM UP, SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS, (This is God's reply to their smart remark in chapter 3, verse 15: "We call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up." He says that the proud will not be happy nor the wicked set up, for the day of judgment will cast them into God's oven. Yes, all will be able to discern then between those who are righteous and those who are wicked, those who serve God and those who do not.) THAT IT SHALL LEAVE THEM NEITHER ROOT NOR BRANCH. (They shall be utterly cut off with no hope of recovery. That which is above the ground will be cut off, and that which is below the ground will be pulled up. Psa. 1 and 37, as well as other passages, present valuable material contrasting the ultimate states of the godly and the wicked.)

2. BUT UNTO YOU THAT FEAR MY NAME SHALL THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS ARISE WITH HEALING IN HIS WINGS; AND YE SHALL GO FORTH, AND GROW UP AS CALVES OF THE STALL. (Christ, the light of the world, is here predicted in a similar title, "the Sun of righteousness." Those whose deeds are wrought in God come to the light, John 3:21, but the wicked hated the light of Christ, John 3:19,20, and they expressed that hatred visibly, Luke 2:34,35. In the day of judgment, to which this passage is likely looking, Christ will indeed come as a great blessing to the godly. What appears healthier and happier than calves of the stall that frisk and play with life and energy to spare! The righteous will be like them.)

3. AND YE SHALL TREAD DOWN THE WICKED; FOR THEY SHALL BE ASHES UNDER THE SOLES OF YOUR FEET IN THE DAY THAT I SHALL DO THIS, SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS. (The righteous, who have suffered here because of the ungodly, are to rule and reign with Christ, II Tim. 2:12; Rev. 3:21; 2:26,27; 22:5. Like Moses, we do well to suffer affliction with the people of God for the short season of earthly life than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for that brief span, Heb. 11:25,26.)

4. REMEMBER YE THE LAW OF MOSES MY SERVANT, WHICH I COMMANDED UNTO HIM IN HOREB FOR ALL ISRAEL, WITH THE STATUTES AND JUDGMENTS. (As God nears the end of His Old Testament revelation, He

looks backward to the time when He gave the law to Moses. Following this book's close, Heaven would remain silent for nearly four centuries. Echoing in the ears of all Israel were to be these words, "Remember ye the law of Moses!" for they were to live under that law until the messenger of the new covenant would come and replace it with the new.)

5. BEHOLD, I WILL SEND YOU ELIJAH THE PROPHET BEFORE THE COMING OF THE GREAT AND DREADFUL DAY OF THE LORD:

6. AND HE SHALL TURN THE HEART OF THE FATHERS TO THE CHILDREN, AND THE HEART OF THE CHILDREN TO THEIR FATHERS, LEST I COME AND SMITE THE EARTH WITH A CURSE. (Having looked back to the time of the giving of the law, God next looked forward to the coming of John the Baptist, here spoken of as Elijah. That John was the fulfillment of this "Elijah" prophecy, see Matt. 17:10-13. Gabriel quoted this very passage to Zacharias when announcing the birth of John, Luke 1:17. Some in Jesus' day were more prone to think of Him as "Elijah" than as the Messiah, Matt. 16:13,14.

In bringing these studies in the book of Malachi to a close, it is evident that Malachi was not born in a time of encouragement religiously speaking. There was much sin on every hand, and the priestly leaders were just as guilty as the people. To his own generation, Malachi was raised up of God to lift up his voice against their sins in the name of the Lord of hosts. That he did a faithful job is apparent from a study of the book. Though a needed man and a faithful man, the probability is that he was not an appreciated man. But, like all true saints of God, he realized that his life on earth was to be but a span, and that he was to live a life of obedience to the God who created him. Long ago, he passed from the scenes of this life, but his person still lives with God, and for his faithfulness, we are bound to suppose that he will be among that number who will inhabit God's New Jerusalem.